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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [UNSC](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [SY](#) [LE](#)
SUBJECT: LEBANON: MINISTERIAL STATEMENT: RESISTANCE
REMAINS, BUT AUTHORITY OF STATE ENHANCED

REF: A. BEIRUT 766
[1](#)B. BEIRUT 733

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. William Grant for reasons 1.4 (b)
and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) The ministerial committee charged with drafting the government's policy statement reached an agreement on August 1, and the full cabinet is expected to approve the statement on August 4. The statement is an improvement over the previous 2005 ministerial statement in that it gives increased prominence to the role of the state, including a clause stipulating the state's authority over all issues. In the 2005 statement, the clause governing Hizballah, or "the resistance," seemed to give Hizballah exclusive rights for resistance activities. Although in the 2008 statement, Hizballah was successful in maintaining a reference to the "resistance", the clause addressing the issue broadens the right to the resistance to include "Lebanon, its people, army and resistance." March 14 ministers who participated in the drafting committee told us they were pleased with the outcome but recognized that each side could interpret the key clauses to its own advantage. The statement also calls upon the government to adhere to international resolutions, specifically citing UNSCR 1701 (but not 1559), as well as the Special Tribunal.

[1](#)2. (C) The statement outlines the government's agenda from now until the spring 2009 parliamentary elections. The very ambitious program includes issues such as raising the minimum wage, accelerated WTO accession, telecom privatization, and electoral reform. Given the government's short lifespan and financial difficulties, it is unlikely the Siniora government will be able to implement many of these plans.

[1](#)3. (C) With the battle over the ministerial statement over, President Sleiman is expected to travel to Damascus as soon as August 6. The next showdowns between the March 14 majority and the opposition will be in the national dialogue, where the national defense strategy, including the role of Hizballah's arms, will be discussed again, and in the cabinet's consideration of key government appointments, including the new commander of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF). End summary.

PROCEEDING ON TIME

¶4. (C) After 14 meetings, the ministerial committee charged with drafting the government's policy statement reached agreement on August 1, three weeks after PM Siniora's national unity government was formed on July 11. The full cabinet must now approve the statement, expected to happen at a session scheduled for 1700 local time on August 4, by a two-thirds majority. PM Siniora must then send the statement to parliament for the final step of the cabinet formation process, a confidence vote, where a simple majority is sufficient. Speaker Berri's Senior Advisor Ali Hamdan believes parliament will take up the issue beginning August ¶9. This schedule would put the government in conformance with Article 64 of the Constitution, which gives the government 30 days following the decree forming the cabinet to submit the statement to parliament.

MARCH 14 BALANCED "RESISTANCE"
REFERENCES WITH ROLE OF THE STATE

¶5. (C) How to address the "resistance" was the main hurdle during the drafting sessions. Hizballah insisted on repeating the pro-Hizballah language from the 2005 agreement; March 14 refused. However, as expected, Hizballah's cabinet minister on the drafting committee was successful in enshrining the concept of the "resistance" in the government's policy statement. March 14 members of the committee, knowing that there would have to be reference to the resistance, focused their negotiating efforts on adding

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language on the role of the Lebanese state, to try to weaken Hizballah's virtual "state within a state" status. Hizballah was unable to translate its apparent political gains in recent months (including securing a blocking third in the cabinet at Doha and a recent boost in popularity following the release of Samir Kantar and other Lebanese prisoners from Israel) into significantly stronger language legitimizing its arms.

¶6. (C) The 2005 statement reads:
"The Cabinet considers the Lebanese resistance a natural and sincere expression of the national right of the Lebanese people in liberating their territory and defending their dignity in face of the Israeli aggressions, threats, and desires, and working on the continuation of liberating Lebanese territory."

In contrast, the 2008 statement makes it clear that the right to the resistance is not exclusive to Hizballah:

"Based on the right of the state to preserve the sovereignty and independence of Lebanon and its unity and the safety of its territories according to the constitution, the cabinet asserts the following: The right of Lebanon, through its people, army, and its resistance, to liberate and regain Sheba'a Farms and Kfar Shouba Hills and the Lebanese part of Ghajar, and the right of Lebanon to defend any aggression or confrontation, and to adhere to its right in its waters by all legitimate and available means."

A later provision in the statement, Article 25, calls for putting Sheba'a under UN control, as called for in PM Siniora's seven point plan following the end of the 2006 war.

¶7. (C) The subsequent two clauses stress the government's commitment to UNSCR 1701 and all of its provisions, and to planning a national defense strategy to protect Lebanon. The upcoming National Dialogue, to be called for by President Sleiman in partnership with the Arab League, is intended to develop the national defense strategy. Article eight states that the government "emphasizes adherence to the concept of President Michel Sleiman's oath of office and his call for dialogue, commitment to the constitution and the national

charter." Sleiman's inaugural address spoke of the resistance in the past tense (Ref A) -- a tactic March 14 reportedly also tried, but failed, to use in the ministerial statement. Sleiman also spoke of the need "to develop a defensive strategy that preserves the nation in parallel with a calm dialogue so as to take advantage of the resistance's energies and put them to the service of this strategy."

MAJORITY SUCCEEDS IN
CODIFYING ROLE OF STATE

¶8. (C) Importantly, the statement gives increased prominence, compared to 2005, to the role of the Lebanese state. Article seven states:

"The government emphasizes its adherence to the principle of state unity and its authority over all issues related to the general policy of the country to safeguard Lebanon and its national unity and regulate the paths, decisions and commitments made by the government. This principle governs all clauses of the policy statement."

In a statement following the committee's last meeting, committee member and March 14 Minister of Information Tareq Mitri affirmed that, "The unity of the state and its authority are the guiding principles of all the decisions in the government." He said this principle of state authority applied to the entire ministerial statement, implying that the state's authority also applies to the resistance.

HIZBALLAH CLAIMS
STATEMENT SUPPORTS
ITS ARMS, ACTIVITIES

¶9. (C) Hizballah Deputy SYG Naim Qassem said on August 2 that
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the statement shows Lebanon is "keen on maintaining" its resistance and the defense strategy discussions would focus on how to make use of Hizballah's strength and how to benefit from all of Lebanon's capabilities and resources. Hizballah MP Hassan Fadlallah stressed that the intent of the statement was to demonstrate that the army and resistance should cooperate to liberate Lebanon, and that the resistance weapons are necessary to defend Lebanon's territory and resist Israeli aggression.

¶10. (C) PM Siniora, however, stressed that the resistance is a general Lebanese cause that is not restricted to one party. "Upon reading the ministerial statement," he said, "you will realize that the state is the authority in charge of providing security and safety for the people...liberation is also part of the state's duties. Nobody wants to ignore the sacrifices that the resistance has made in the past years to end (Israeli) occupation, but no party can monopolize resistance and accuse others of being against it."

¶11. (C) Minister of State Nassib Lahoud, representing March 14 on the drafting committee, proposed language stating that the "resistance should operate under the wing of the state," a phrase the drafting committee did not agree on. Lahoud told us on August 4 that he will propose his idea again in the full cabinet meeting, but will not seek to block approval of the statement.

¶12. (C) Kataeb member and Minister of Tourism Elie Marouni shared Lahoud's concern, and planned to meet later on August 4 with Kataeb leader and former President Amine Gemayel to decide whether to make a formal reservation. However, Gemayel's advisor, Michel Mecattef, told A/DCM the final text was much better than Kataeb had expected based on what he had seen a few days earlier.

¶13. (C) Ghattas Khoury, advisor to majority leader Saad

Hariri, told CDA the statement was good for three reasons: March 14 was able to incorporate strong references to the state's responsibility for security, the army as a partner with the resistance, and 1701, even though it had not been successful in including language on disarming Hizballah.

¶14. (C) Druze MP and Minister of State Wael Abu Four, also a committee member, told A/DCM the statement was better than the 2005 statement, which stated that the resistance was necessary and therefore could not be questioned. In contrast, the 2008 statement highlights the role of the state and army, in addition to the resistance, and clearly highlights the state's authority over all issues and the need to comply with UNSCR 1701. The language on the resistance was much weaker than what Hizballah Minister Mohamad Fneish had originally proposed, Abu Four noted, adding that after three weeks of tough negotiations Hizballah had only succeeded in achieving a "vague paragraph that gives them nothing and leaves the issue open."

¶15. (C) Lebanese Forces (LF) leader Samir Geagea also was not satisfied with the language on the resistance, saying that "protecting and defending Lebanon should be the exclusive duty of the security and armed forces." Geagea advisor Elie Khoury told PolOff that LF members had hoped for language that would allow further movement on addressing Hizballah's arms, and were disappointed the statement did not place the resistance under the authority of the government. He added, however, that "words alone will not change Hizballah's actions," and therefore deemed agreement on the statement to allow the government to function more important than the final text.

¶16. (C) On the opposition side, Berri advisor Ali Hamdan told A/DCM that formal reservations will have no practical effect on the statement; once PM Siniora submits it to parliament, Berri must convene a confidence vote. Hamdan deemed the statement "ok," commenting that "this is the season of compromise." He expressed dismay that the Lebanese were divided over the issue of the resistance, when they faced a common Israeli enemy. He also lamented the fact that, although the document contained many "excellent ideas," there was nothing in the document to outline how the government

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would implement its program, especially regarding socio-economic issues such as combatting poverty and the high price of oil.

COMMITMENT TO SPECIAL TRIBUNAL,
PARIS III, ELECTORAL REFORM

¶17. (C) The statement reaffirms the government's commitment to the Special Tribunal as a means to achieve justice for the assassination of former PM Rafiq Hariri and others, without politicizing the Tribunal. The GOL also pledges to implement Paris III reforms, taking into consideration the domestic and international economic changes over the past two years, as well as Lebanon's exceptional circumstances. The statement calls for free and fair elections and electoral reforms as agreed at Doha (Ref B) and using the draft Boutros law as a basis for discussion.

RELATIONS WITH SYRIA

¶18. (C) The statement calls for diplomatic relations with Syria, based on mutual respect and sovereignty, and the delineation of the border between the two countries. It also calls for the return of Lebanese detainees in Syria as part of the normalization of the relationship between the two countries. Lebanese president Sleiman had made clear he would travel to Syria shortly after the cabinet statement was approved. We hear the visit may be as soon as Tuesday, August 6.

NO PERMANENT SETTLEMENT
OF PALESTINIAN REFUGEES

¶19. (C) Article 27 rejects the resettlement of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and calls upon the international community to ensure the Palestinians' right to return to their homeland. The committee members, including Hizballah, reportedly refused to adopt language proposed by Aoun representative Gebran Bassil encouraging Palestinians to leave Lebanon; language which Nassib Lahoud told us bordered on racism. Included in this article is a victory for the Aoun camp, but at the same time, it eliminates the ability of Aoun to accuse the Siniora government, of which his bloc is now a part, of favoring "tawteen" (resettlement) as a means to tip the demographic balance in favor of the Sunnis. Articles 28 and 29 address the issue of weapons outside the camps and the need to extend the authority of the state over all of the Lebanese territory, as well as the need to improve conditions within the camp and to rebuild the Nahr al-Barid camp.

CONFRONTING TERRORISM

¶20. (C) Article 18 states that it is the duty of the government to prevent terrorists from endangering Lebanon's stability. The article mentions the LAF's victory in defeating extremist elements in Nahr al-Barid, noting that this victory earned the LAF and the government the trust of the Lebanese people.

NEXT ROUNDS:
NATIONAL DIALOGUE
MILITARY, JUDICIAL APPOINTMENTS
2009 ELECTIONS

¶21. (C) The relationship between the state and Hizballah will continue to be debated in the national dialogue chaired by President Sleiman that will address, among other issues, a national defense strategy. Sleiman is expected, in partnership with the Arab League, to begin the dialogue once the cabinet obtains the parliamentary vote of confidence on its program.

¶22. (C) The next challenge for the government is appointing top government officials. The key appointments include the

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new commander of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and LAF G-2 Military Intelligence Director, the 10 member Constitutional Council, and possibly the chiefs of the Internal Security Forces (ISF) and Surete Generale. Current predictions are that either Second Brigade Commander BG Jean Qahwaji or current G-2 Director BG Georges Khoury will become the next LAF Commander, while either BG Joseph Njeim or BG Ghassan Salem will become the G-2 Director. General Nabil Mehri, head of the Beirut area ISF, is rumored to be a possible replacement for ISF Director General Ashraf Rifi, although it is unclear whether either Rifi or Surete Generale chief Wafiq Jezzini must be replaced.

¶23. (C) Former Telecom Minister and Druze MP Marwan Hamadeh predicted difficulties in appointing military and security commanders, as well as other key public sector posts, before the 2009 elections. Furthermore, March 14 contacts have frequently warned that Aoun and Hizballah will attempt to "govern by proxy" by securing key positions within the LAF and other institutions as a means to rule from within.

VICTORY FOR CHRISTIANS?

¶24. (C) Many of Aoun's ideas intended to benefit the

Christians are included in the text, including the need to battle corruption, resolve the issues of Lebanese detainees in Syria and Christians displaced during the civil war, as well as Lebanese who disappeared during the war, prohibit the resettlement of Palestinian refugees ("tawteen") in Lebanon, and seek the return of Lebanese who fled to Israel during the 2006 war with Hizballah (an issue that Hizballah opposed in 2005, but this time allowed its Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) allies to include). Druze MP Abu Four, a committee member, told A/DCM that, with the exception of "tawteen," Aoun representative Gebran Bassil was not very active in the negotiations, and that even there the committee had rejected his efforts to include language giving the state the right to ask the Palestinians to leave. Furthermore, Gemayel advisor Michel Mecattef told A/DCM that these are issues March 14 itself has been pushing.

¶25. (C) Nevertheless, Bassil has been quick to claim credit, saying the FPM was successful in including issues that were considered taboo in the past. Bassil told A/DCM the opposition was "quite satisfied" with the statement, which included many issues for the first time, such as revisiting the 1995 decree allowing Arabs residing in Lebanon to be naturalized. (Note: The decree resulted in the naturalization of many Sunni Arabs. End note.) Bassil also cited the government's commitment to ensuring there would be no "tawteen" and the call upon the international community to bear responsibility for the plight of the Palestinians as key successes, as well the fact that the document addressed the relationship between the state and "armed factions," which he said were clearly under the rule of the state. Bassil said he hoped the cabinet would approve the document unanimously.

¶26. (C) Geagea advisor Elie Khoury told PolOff he predicted the statement would give the impression that March 14 had conceded to the opposition, citing Bassil's August 2 televised remarks claiming credit for a number of issues. We will urge March 14 Christians to highlight these achievements to avoid letting Aoun use them to argue once again that he is the best advocate of Christian interests.

COMMENT

¶27. (C) The statement exhibits the deliberate lack of clarity typical of Lebanese consensus-driven agreements, leaving something for each side to claim victory. The majority will point to the preamble's recognition of the authority of the state over all issues in the statement, while Hizballah will tout the references to the resistance as quasi-legal justification for its arms.

¶28. (C) Overall, however, we view the 2008 statement as an improvement over 2005 in terms of enhancing the role of both the state and army. In addition, there are numerous

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¶29. (C) The absence of UNSCR 1559 is not surprising. Speaker Berri has long lobbied to omit any reference to UNSCR 1559 (which calls for the disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias), arguing it is incorporated into 1701 (which calls for no weapons "without the consent of the Government of Lebanon," leaving a loophole for Hizballah to argue that its weapons have the consent of the government).

GRANT